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DE RUEHKT #0461/01 1540908
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0261
INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6975
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 7298
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2620
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5342
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6480
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3055
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4615
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2329
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3538
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000461

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2019

TAGS: PGOV PTER KDEM IN NP

SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOIST LEADER AFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR
DEMOCRATIC PROCESS BUT PLANS UNCLEAR

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) United Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist (UCPN-M) chairman Pushpa Dahal told the Ambassador June 2 that the Maoists intended to continue to support the democratic process in Nepal. Dahal, who was accompanied by ex-Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, said that the Maoists would participate in the peace process and the constitution-drafting process. But he added that they were also planning a series of protests against President Yadav's decision to reinstate Chief of Army Staff General Katawal. The UCPN-M chief admitted that his party had made some mistakes over the previous year in its dealings with the other major parties. He urged the U.S. to use its influence on India to prevail upon New Delhi to return to its old position vis a vis the Maoists. Dahal said he would take advantage of his increased free time to deal with "extremists" in his own party.

Dahal Affirms Support for Democracy

¶2. (C) In the Ambassador's first meeting with United Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist (UCPN-M) chairman and former Prime Minister Pushpa Dahal since the swearing-in of Nepal's new government, Dahal re-affirmed his support for Nepal's multiparty democracy. The UCPN-M chairman pointed out, despite their differences with the other major parties, that Maoists had allowed the Constituent Assembly (CA) to meet and elect veteran Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) leader Madhav Kumar Nepal Prime Minister on May 23. Dahal, and former Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai who joined him, stressed that the Maoists had made a considered decision as a party several years ago to pursue peaceful, democratic politics and they were not going to let themselves be provoked into returning to the politics of violence.

Maoists To Participate In Peace Process, Constitution Drafting

¶3. (C) Dahal and Bhattarai also emphasized that, even though the Maoists are now in the opposition, they intend to continue to participate actively in the peace process and the

drafting of the country's new constitution. The UCPN-M chairman said that he hoped the Maoists would be permitted to continue to chair the Special Committee on Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Combatants. That would allow the process to go more smoothly. However, that decision was up to the new government. And he confirmed, in response to a question from the Ambassador, that the Maoists would still take part in the Special Committee even if a different party was in the chair. (Note: Former PM Dahal was the chair of the key, four-party, 8-person committee.) Dahal said it was also not yet decided who would chair the main constitution drafting committee now that M.K. Nepal had become Prime Minister. The Maoist chairman pointed out that the first of the subject committees to present its concept paper for the constitution, which happened a few days' earlier, was chaired by a Maoist.

Protests Planned; Scope Unclear

¶4. (C) The former Prime Minister stated that the Maoists were still determined to uphold "civilian supremacy" in contesting the "unconstitutional" decision by President Ram Baran Yadav to reinstate Chief of Army Staff General Katawal, after Katawal's sacking by the Maoist cabinet. Dahal mentioned that a series of protests were planned, but, even when pressed, he was vague about the details. Subsequent press reporting indicates that the Maoists are launching protests against the President's decision at the district level. According to the CA Chairman's personal assistant, they have

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also been boycotting parliamentary sessions of the CA. They have not resumed the disruptions of the parliament which they were engaging in immediately prior to M.K. Nepal's election.

"We Made Some Mistakes"

¶5. (C) The UCPN chairman admitted, "We made some mistakes" in how we handled the other major parties over the past year. Dahal conceded that if the UCPN-M had agreed to give the Nepali Congress the Defense Ministry, a government of national unity might have been formed and the Maoist government would still be in place. More recently, in hindsight, the former PM admitted, the UML's proposal, which the Maoists rejected, to have General Katawal and his deputy step down in favor of the third man in the NA might have been a good solution. They had made other mistakes, he and Bhattarai stated, and the party was currently in the process of reviewing them and learning from them.

Help with India; Dealing with Maoist Extremists

¶6. (C) Dahal also appealed to the United States to use its influence with India to persuade New Delhi to return to its old, more positive position toward the Maoists. The UCPN-M chairman said that the Maoists had been openly critical of India's role in Nepal because its policy toward the Maoists appeared in recent weeks to have changed. He professed to not know exactly why that had happened. (Comment: In post's view, the appeal is disingenuous since Dahal should know full well that it was his determination to sack Katawal in the face of clear Indian dissatisfaction and an absence of consensus even within his own coalition which was largely to blame.) Dahal also said that he was taking advantage of his additional free time since stepping down as PM to reform his party, and in particular, to deal with the "extremists" who opposed the Maoist policy of participating in democratic, multiparty politics. He hoped to complete the process within 2-3 months.

Comment

¶7. (C) Despite the democratic rhetoric, there is considerable skepticism among Nepalis and within the U.S. Mission about whether the Maoists do in fact intend to keep their protests peaceful. Furthermore, as a senior UML leader pointed out to Emboffs June 3, the notion that the Maoists can somehow continue their support for the peace process and the constitution, while maintaining a series of protests on the streets and in the parliament against the government is unrealistic. If they Maoist protests turn violent, as many observers worry they will, the peace process and the prospects for a new constitution will suffer.

POWELL